

Halfway to History: Progress & Challenges in Closing Rikers Island FACT SHEET

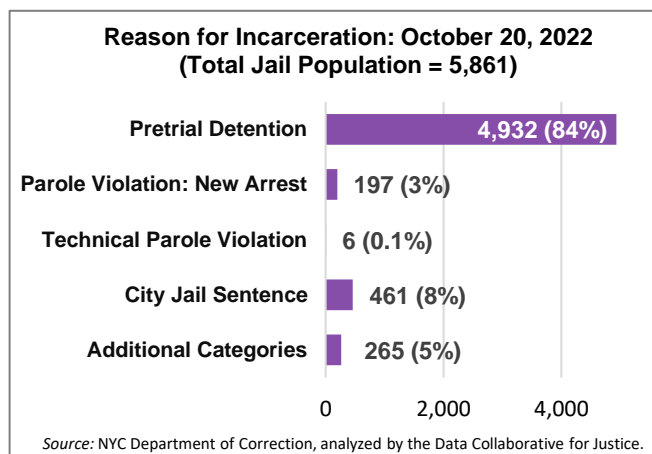
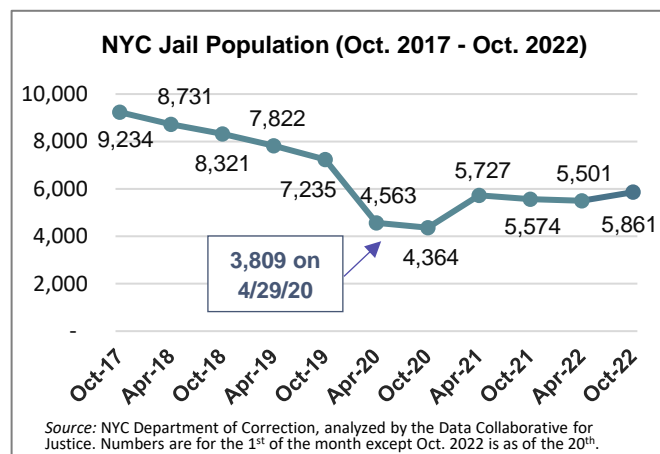
The Plan to Close Rikers Island

Under [New York City law](#), the Rikers Island jails must be closed entirely by August 31, 2027. Rikers has long been an incubator of violence, crime, and suffering. [Closing Rikers](#) and replacing it with a more efficient and effective system of borough-based jails and secure hospital beds is essential to safety, justice, and racial equity for all New Yorkers, including people locked up and working in the jails under dangerous and decrepit conditions, and crime victims. **The plan to close Rikers has five elements:**

- 1. Safe and Effective Jail Reduction:** Methodically and significantly reduce the incarcerated population. The [Lippman Commission’s 2021](#) and [2022](#) blueprints lay out how to do this, *while increasing public safety*.
- 2. Shutting Rikers:** Replace the Rikers jails, built on decaying landfill and plagued by terrible sightlines, broken cell doors, and sewage leaks, with a new system slated to have 3,544 jail beds and 380 secure hospital beds.
- 3. Culture Change:** Transform Rikers’ chaotic environment into one characterized by strong management and oversight, safe conditions for people incarcerated and working in the jails, and a focus on successful reentry.
- 4. Renewable Rikers:** Remake the island into a [hub of green infrastructure](#), advancing the fight against climate change and allowing removal of polluting power and sewage plants from overburdened communities.
- 5. Community Reinvestment:** [Reinvest](#) the billions of dollars that will be saved by closing Rikers into communities disproportionately harmed by a legacy of underinvestment and overincarceration.

New York City’s Daily Jail Population (Updated as of October 20, 2022)

- Overall Daily Jail Population:** From over **20,400** people in 1991, the daily jail population dropped to just over **9,200** in October 2017. On October 20, 2022, **5,861** people were jailed. The population reached a low of **3,809** on April 29, 2020, after NYC [strategically and carefully](#) released people to meet COVID’s dangers.
- Most People are Jailed Awaiting Trial:** People held before trial—while presumed innocent—make up **84%** of the October 2022 jail population—up from **56%** in March 2020.
- Half the People Need Mental Health Treatment:** On October 20, 2022, **51%** of people in NYC jails had received mental health services, up from **42%** in October 2017. That includes **85%** of women and **49%** of men. As of September 2022, [18% of people in jail](#) had a serious mental illness, up from [10% in FY 2017](#).
- Prolonged Times in Custody:** People held pretrial on October 20, 2022 had been held **286 days** on average—**25 days more** than before the pandemic—keeping them and crime victims waiting for answers and accountability. While courts have significantly reduced their COVID-related backlog, the Lippman Commission and DCJ project ending the backlog and [pre-pandemic delays](#) would mean **1,300 fewer** people in Rikers.



- **Longer Stays with Mental Health Needs:** As of October 20, 2020, people awaiting trial who had received mental health services in jail had been held **over 50%** longer than others (340 vs. 224 days).
- **Most People Held Pretrial Are Alleged to Have Committed a Violent Crime:** As of October 15, 2022, **79%** of the 4,932 people jailed pretrial were charged with violent felonies, **17%** with nonviolent felonies, and **4%** with misdemeanors or lesser charges. The violent felony numbers include **1,499** people charged with murder, **660** with robbery, **510** with assault, and **460** with firearms or other weapons offenses.
- **Increasing Sentenced Population:** Just over **460 people**, representing **8%** of the October 2022 jail population, were held on sentences of under a year. While a steep decline from over 1,200 held on such sentences in October 2017, the sentenced population had reached as few as **129 people** on April 29, 2020.
- **Few Held on Alleged Parole Violations:** Just **3%** of the October 2022 daily jail population (totaling 203 people) were held on alleged technical parole violations or alleged parole violations stemming from a new arrest—an **over 80% decline** from 13 months ago, when Governor Kathy Hochul signed the [Less is More Act](#) on September 17, 2021.
- **Worsening Racial Disparities:** Although Black people make up **24%** of NYC’s general population, they are **61%** of the City’s daily jail population as of October 20, 2022, up from **55%** in October 2017.
- **Women’s Incarceration:** From October 2017 to October 2022, the number of women at Rikers **declined 44% to 344**. Criminal justice actors had reduced that number safely to **149** at the start of pandemic. The Commission, DCJ, and the Women’s Community Justice Association have laid out safe, effective, [gender-responsive strategies](#) to have **fewer than 100** women and gender-expansive people in jail on any given day.
- **Population by Borough:** As of September 2022, [32% of the jail population](#) was incarcerated on cases filed in Manhattan, **25%** in Brooklyn, **21%** in the Bronx, **18%** in Queens, and **4%** in Staten Island. Manhattan’s share fell 6% (from 38%) from [2017](#), while Brooklyn’s and the Bronx’s each rose by 3 points.

Jail Conditions and Cost

- **Stabbings and Slashings:** In the past five years, [stabbings and slashings](#) in NYC jails have **tripled** (from 165 in FY2017 to 491 in FY2022). The rate of such violent events per 1,000 people in jail increased more than fivefold from **17.4** in FY2017 to **88.3** in FY2022.
- **Assaults on Staff:** Assaults on staff [increased by 29%](#) from 2017 to 2021 (864 to 1,117), before declining in 2022 (537 through August). Comparing the first nine months of 2021 and 2022, the rate of assaults on staff per 1,000 jailed people [dropped by 31%](#).
- **Deaths in Custody:** Through October 24, 2022, **17** incarcerated people have died vs. **6** deaths in 2017.
- **Cost of \$500,000 Per Person:** Rikers costs NYC taxpayers about [\\$500,000](#) per incarcerated person per year.
- **Billions in Savings from the City’s Jail Plan:** The Lippman Commission and CUNY Institute for State and Local Governance (ISLG) estimate the smaller, more efficient borough-based jails will save the City **\$2 billion per year** in operating costs. The new jails will be paid for with bonds, repaid over a 30-year period. The Commission and ISLG estimate that even with construction inflation of over 20%, absent any cost-saving measures for the new jails, those bond payments will cost roughly **\$660 million per year**. The City should also spend \$275 million, or **\$18 million per year** in bond payments, for a new training academy for correction officers. That would leave a net savings of over **\$1.3 billion per year**, which could be [reinvested in communities](#). By contrast, building new jails on Rikers would [cost up to 15% more](#) and take years longer. Doing so would also be [illegal](#) under NYC [law](#).

Justice, Safety, and the Promise of Closing Rikers Island

For three decades before COVID, New York City simultaneously cut both the [jail population](#) and [major crimes](#) by 70%. Using [proven policies and practices](#) that NYC has already shown increase safety, justice, and racial equity far more effectively and cheaply than Rikers, we can and must return to that path, and close Rikers forever.